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Denotation and Connotation

STUDENT OBJECTIVES

- Distinguish between denotation and connotation
- Use context clues to infer a word's connotations
- Examine how context and audience can affect a word's connotations

RESOURCES AND PREPARATION

You will need photocopies for students of:

- **Student Lesson Summary**, p. 147
- **Practice Worksheets**, Levels A and B, pp. 148–149
- **Reteaching Worksheet**, p. 150

Teach

- 1. Denotation and Connotation:** Explain that every word has two kinds of meanings: its **denotation**, or straightforward dictionary definition, and its **connotations**, which include all the thoughts, emotional associations, and feelings that word evokes in people's minds—positive, negative, or neutral.
- 2. Teaching Denotation and Connotation:** Distribute the **Lesson Summary** and go over the **Academic Vocabulary**. Then walk students through the **Here's How** steps. Illustrate the difference between denoted and connoted meanings with the following activities.
 - **Denotation:** Write the following examples on the board, noting that *snicker* and *roar* have a denotation similar to *laugh*, but have shades of meaning that may be less familiar. Have a volunteer look up the dictionary definitions of the underlined words. (*Sample: laugh, to express amusement; snicker, to laugh disrespectfully; roar, to give a loud, long laugh*)

EXAMPLE The audience laughed at the comedian's performance. The audience snickered at the comedian's performance. The audience roared at the comedian's performance.

- **Context:** Ask volunteers to read each sentence aloud. Point out that the **context** of a comedian's performance gives the words special meaning, since the comedian is striving for laughter. Explain that *snickered* suggests the audience found the comedian's act weak, while *roared* suggests the audience was heartily amused.
- **Connotation:** Have students suggest whether the underlined word in each sentence has a negative, positive, or neutral connotation. (*Sample: laughed, neutral; snickered, negative; roared, positive*) Draw the following graphic on the board. Ask: What other words can you think of that mean *laugh*? As students call out responses, ask where they should fall on the continuum, and write them on the graphic accordingly. (*Sample: snigger, titter, chuckle, guffaw*)

EXAMPLE: CONNOTATIONS

EXAM 1: CONNOTATIONS

Negative Neutral Positive

←-----→

snicker roar

- **Word Choice:** Direct students' attention to the final example on the **Lesson Summary**. Ask students to work in pairs to come up with *two* more synonyms for

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bold (meaning *courageous*) and to use each word in a sentence that makes its connotations clear. Have volunteers write their sentences on the board, underlining any context clues.

3. Guided Practice: Give students practice applying the

- Context: Write the following sentences on the board. Ask: What context clues help you figure out the connotations of the underlined words? (*Sample: “peeked at” suggests that “slinked” has the negative connotation of “walking stealthily”; “marched” has military connotations and suggests confidence or an aggressive, hostile action.*)

EXAMPLE The man slinked into the boss’s office and peeked at the file. The man marched into the boss’s office and examined the file.

- Word Choice: Write the following example on the board. Remind students that in their own writing, they should aim to use just the right word, with connotations that best express their meaning. Ask volunteers what synonym for *smiled* they might use to suggest either positive or negative connotations. Allow them to consult a thesaurus if they wish. (*Sample: positive: beamed, grinned; negative: smirked*)

EXAMPLE	Positive	Neutral	Negative
	He _____ at the boss.	He <u>smiled</u> at the boss.	He _____ at the boss.

- Audience: Point out that a word’s connotations depend not only on the way it is used, but also on the audience. “Gee, Uncle Ted, what an unusual tie,” is a comment that may please Uncle Ted, but telling your mother, “That dinner was, uh, *unusual*, Mom,” might be taken as an insult.

QUICK CHECK. Ask students whether they would rather be called *curious* or *nosy*. Have them write an explanation for their answer, using complete sentences. (*Sample: Both words suggest that a person takes an interest in others. Curious, however, has positive connotations, while nosy suggests that the person is really just a gossip.*)

Practice and Apply

Activities involving denotation and connotation appear on pp. 148–149.

- Assign **Practice Worksheet A** to students who need more structured activities.
- Assign **Practice Worksheet B** to grade-level and above-level students.

Answer Key: Practice Worksheet A

1. *go getting* +; *pushy* -
2. *notorious* - ; *famous* +
3. *scrawny* - ; *lean* +
4. *witty* +; *sly* -
5. *gaudy* - ; *bright* +
6. *Negative: The context suggests that “too showy” means “too much” or “inappropriate.”*
7. *Positive: The context words cookies and happy suggest a positive connotation for smell.*
8. *Negative: A wound cannot be described as “businesslike”; using serious to describe a wound creates a negative context.*
9. *Positive: Admired, craft, and magically transformed all suggest that the context is positive.*
10. *Positive: Nothing in the context suggests that smart here means “disrespectful.”*

Sample Answers: Practice Worksheet B

1. + *go-getting*; - *pushy*
2. + *famous*; - *notorious*
3. + *lean*; - *scrawny*
4. + *witty*; - *sly*
5. + *bright*; - *gaudy*
6. *Positive: Doesn't the smell of cookies baking call up happy memories?*
Negative: We unlocked the door, entered the room, and gagged on the smell.
7. *Positive: Managers and workers came to a settlement after a serious meeting.*
Negative: The soldier knew immediately that she had received a serious wound.
8. *Positive: The old traditions are slowly being forgotten.*
Negative: Our old house has seen better days.

DENOTATION AND CONNOTATION, CONTINUED

Assess and Reteach

Use these guidelines to determine if students need the **Reteaching Worksheet**.

- **Practice Worksheet A:** Students should correctly answer at least eight of ten items.
- **Practice Worksheet B:** Students should correctly answer at least four of items 1–5.
For items 6–8, students should write both positive *and* negative sentences for at least two items.

For students who need reteaching, review the **Student Lesson Summary**. Focus on the **Here's How** steps using the **Teaching Model**. Then assign the **Reteaching Worksheet**, p. 150.

Sample Answers: Reteaching Worksheet

1. *F* 2. *T* 3. *F* 4. *F* 5. *T* 6. *positive* 7. *The word praised helped me figure out that cool has a positive meaning.* 8. *calm* 9. *negative* 10. *The baby's skin was as soft as velvet.*